

**UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE WESTERN DISTRICT OF MICHIGAN
SOUTHERN DIVISION**

SHARON GAYNOR,

Plaintiff,

v.

J.J. MARSHALL & ASSOCIATES, INC.,

Defendant.

CIVIL COMPLAINT

CASE NO. 1:23-cv-172

DEMAND FOR JURY TRIAL

COMPLAINT

NOW COMES Plaintiff, SHARON GAYNOR (“Plaintiff”), by and through her attorneys, Consumer Law Partners, LLC, complaining as to the conduct of J.J. MARSHALL & ASSOCIATES, INC. (“Defendant”), as follows:

NATURE OF THE ACTION

1. Plaintiff brings this action for damages pursuant to the Fair Debt Collection Practices Act (“FDCPA”) under 15 U.S.C. §1692 *et seq.*, and the Michigan Occupational Code (“MOC”) under M.C.L. §339.901 *et seq.*, for Defendant’s unlawful conduct.

JURISDICTION AND VENUE

2. This action arises under and is brought pursuant to the FDCPA. Subject matter jurisdiction is conferred upon this Court by 15 U.S.C §1692, 28 U.S.C. §§1331 and 1337, as the action arises under the laws of the United States. Supplemental jurisdiction exists for Plaintiff’s state law claim pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1337.

3. Venue is proper in this Court pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §1391 as Defendant conducts business in the Western District of Michigan and a substantial portion of the events or omissions giving rise to the claims occurred within the Western District of Michigan.

PARTIES

4. Plaintiff is a disabled consumer over 18 years-of-age residing in Allegan County, Michigan, which is located within the Western District of Michigan.

5. Defendant is “a leader in providing specialized debt collection recovery services.”¹ Defendant is a third-party debt collector organized under the laws of the state of Michigan, with its principal place of business located at 28820 Mound Road, Warren, Michigan 48092.

6. Defendant acted through its agents, employees, officers, members, directors, heirs, successors, assigns, principals, trustees, sureties, subrogees, representatives and insurers at all times relevant to the instant action.

FACTS SUPPORTING CAUSES OF ACTION

7. For the last several months, Plaintiff has been looking to improve her credit, so she accessed her Experian credit report and was surprised to see an entry bearing Defendant’s name, who was reporting in an active collection status, a purported residential lease debt (“subject debt”) that Plaintiff originally incurred with *Fairlane Apartments, LLC* (“Fairlane”).

8. Plaintiff did not agree with the subject debt, as any balance owed to Fairlane was significantly lower than what Defendant was communicating to Experian.

9. Accordingly, on or about January 12, 2023, Plaintiff contacted Defendant via telephone and relayed this information, along with the fact that Plaintiff disputed owing the subject debt.

10. Rather than notate Plaintiff’s dispute and inform Fairlane of the same, Defendant’s

¹ <https://www.jjmarshallinc.com/about-us/>

representative disregarded Plaintiff's information and attempted to collect upon the subject debt.

11. A few weeks later, Plaintiff checked her credit report to ensure that Defendant was no longer reporting the subject debt, but much to her dismay, not only was Defendant reporting the subject debt in an active collection status, but Defendant also failed to note that the subject debt was being disputed by Plaintiff. *See* attached Exhibit A for relevant page(s) from Plaintiff's Experian credit report.

12. Plaintiff was perplexed by Defendant's failure to communicate to Experian that the subject debt was disputed, especially given the fact that Defendant re-reported the subject debt to Experian on January 18, 2023, which was well after Plaintiff's dispute with Defendant. *See Id.*

13. To date, Defendant has failed to notify Experian regarding Plaintiff's dispute of the subject debt, and has continued to disseminate false information regarding Plaintiff to third parties.

14. Frustrated with Defendant's conduct, Plaintiff spoke with the undersigned counsel regarding her rights, resulting in expenses.

15. Plaintiff justifiably fears that, absent this Court's intervention, Defendant will continue to attempt to collect payment from her by falsely communicating information regarding the subject debt to credit reporting agencies, and ultimately cause unwarranted harm to her credit or otherwise harm her economically.

16. The erroneous reporting of the subject debt paints a false and damaging image of Plaintiff. Specifically, Defendant's inaccurate reporting has had a significant adverse impact on Plaintiff's credit rating and creditworthiness because it misleads creditors into believing that Plaintiff has outstanding accounts that remain unpaid and are acknowledged by Plaintiff.

17. The entire experience has imposed upon Plaintiff significant distrust, frustration, distress, and has rendered Plaintiff helpless as to her ability to regain a firm foothold on her

creditworthiness, credit standing, and credit capacity.

18. Defendant's conduct and disputed credit reporting has caused Plaintiff additional concrete harm, including but not limited to: a decreased credit score, the dissemination of false information to one or more third parties, the exacerbation of her physical and medical symptoms, loss of sleep, expending time addressing and dealing with Defendant's confusing and false conduct, and a violation of her state and federally protected interests to be provided clear and accurate information regarding the debt serving as the basis of Defendant's collection efforts.

COUNT I – VIOLATIONS OF THE FAIR DEBT COLLECTION PRACTICES ACT

19. Plaintiff repeats and realleges paragraphs 1 through 18 as though fully set forth herein.

20. Plaintiff is a "consumer" as defined by 15 U.S.C. § 1692a(3) of the FDCPA.

21. Defendant is a "debt collector" as defined by § 1692a(6) of the FDCPA, because it regularly uses the mail and/or the telephone to collect, or attempt to collect, delinquent consumer accounts.

22. Defendant identifies itself as a debt collector, and is engaged in the business of collecting or attempting to collect, directly or indirectly, defaulted debts owed or due or asserted to be owed or due to others.

23. The subject debt is a "debt" as defined by FDCPA § 1692a(5) as it arises out of a transaction due or asserted to be owed or due to another for personal, family, or household purposes.

i. Violations of 15 U.S.C § 1692e

24. The FDCPA, pursuant to 15 U.S.C. § 1692e, prohibits a debt collector from using "any false, deceptive, or misleading representation or means in connection with the collection of any debt."

25. In addition, this section enumerates specific violations, such as:

“The false representation of – the character, amount, or legal status of any debt.” 15 U.S.C. § 1692e(2)(A);

“Communicating or threatening to communicate to any person credit information which is known or which should be known to be false, *including the failure to communicate that a disputed debt is disputed.*” 15 U.S.C. § 1692e(8) (emphasis added); and

“The use of any false representation or deceptive means to collect or attempt to collect any debt or to obtain information concerning a consumer.” 15 U.S.C. § 1692e(10).

26. Defendant violated 15 U.S.C. §§ 1692e, e(2)(A), e(8), and e(10) when it used false and deceptive means to collect and/or attempt to collect the subject debt. Specifically, it was false and misleading for Defendant to report the subject debt to Experian in an active collection status, when not only did Plaintiff not owe the subject debt, but she explicitly disputed the same directly with Defendant. Yet, Defendant failed to communicate Plaintiff’s dispute to the credit reporting agencies. Consequently, Defendant knowingly communicated false and incomplete credit information to Experian, knowing it would affect Plaintiff’s creditworthiness and ultimately force Plaintiff into making payment on a disputed debt that she did not owe.

ii. Violations of FDCPA § 1692f

27. The FDCPA, pursuant to 15 U.S.C. § 1692f, prohibits a debt collector from using “unfair or unconscionable means to collect or attempt to collect any debt.”

28. Defendant violated § 1692f when it unfairly and unconscionably attempted to collect upon the subject debt through its credit reporting. Plaintiff did not agree with the balance communicated by Defendant and Fairlane, and she disputed owing the same. Plaintiff informed Defendant of this information, but rather than being mindful of this dispute, Defendant disregarded Plaintiff’s contentions and knowingly continued to unfairly report false and incomplete information to the credit bureaus.

29. Furthermore, Defendant's conduct runs afoul of 15 U.S.C. § 1681s-2(a)(3) of the Fair Credit Reporting Act ("FCRA"); and while the FCRA itself does not afford Plaintiff any private remedies for violations under this provision, Defendant's willful abuse of the same is further evidence of its unfair and unconscionable behavior.

30. As pled in paragraphs 14 through 18, *supra*, Plaintiff has been harmed and suffered damages as a result of Defendant's illegal actions.

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff, SHARON GAYNOR, respectfully requests that this Honorable Court enter judgment in her favor as follows:

- a. Declaring that the practices complained of herein are unlawful and violate the aforementioned bodies of law;
- b. Awarding Plaintiff statutory damages of \$1,000.00 as provided under 15 U.S.C. § 1692k(a)(2)(A);
- c. Awarding Plaintiff actual damages, in an amount to be determined at trial, as provided under 15 U.S.C. § 1692k(a)(1);
- d. Awarding Plaintiff costs and reasonable attorney fees as provided under 15 U.S.C. § 1692k(a)(3);
- e. Enjoining Defendant from further contacting Plaintiff seeking payment of the subject debt, and from further credit reporting of the subject debt; and
- f. Awarding any other relief as this Honorable Court deems just and appropriate.

COUNT II – VIOLATIONS OF THE MICHIGAN OCCUPATIONAL CODE

31. Plaintiff restates and realleges paragraphs 1 through 30 as though fully set forth herein.

32. Plaintiff is a "consumer" or "debtor" as defined by M.C.L. § 339.901(f).

33. Defendant is a "collection agency" as defined by M.C.L. § 339.901(b) as it is a person that is directly engaged in collecting or attempting to collect a claim owed or due or asserted to be owed or due another.

34. The subject debt is a "[c]laim" or "debt" as defined by M.C.L. § 339.901(a) as it is an obligation or alleged obligation for the payment of money or thing of value arising out of an

agreement or contract for a purchase made primarily for personal, family, or household purposes.

i. Violations of M.C.L. § 339.915(e)

35. The MOC, pursuant to M.C.L. § 339.915(e) prohibits a collection agency from “[m]aking an inaccurate, misleading, untrue, or deceptive statement or claim in a communication to collect a debt...”

36. Defendant violated M.C.L. § 339.915(e) by making inaccurate and misleading statements with regard to the subject debt. Specifically, it was false and misleading for Defendant to report the subject debt to Experian in an active collection status, when not only did Plaintiff not owe the subject debt, but she explicitly disputed the same directly with Defendant. Yet, Defendant failed to communicate Plaintiff’s dispute to the credit reporting agencies. Consequently, Defendant knowingly communicated false and incomplete credit information to Experian, knowing it would affect Plaintiff’s creditworthiness and ultimately force Plaintiff into making payment on a disputed debt that she did not owe.

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff, SHARON GAYNOR, respectfully requests that this Honorable Court enter judgment in her favor as follows:

- a. Declaring that the practices complained of herein are unlawful and violate the aforementioned statutes and regulations;
- b. Entitling Plaintiff to injunctive relief, pursuant to M.C.L. § 339.916(1);
- c. Awarding Plaintiff actual damages, including treble damages, pursuant to M.C.L. § 339.916(2);
- d. Awarding statutory damages of at least \$50.00, including treble damages, pursuant to M.C.L. § 339.916(2);
- e. Awarding Plaintiff costs and reasonable attorney fees, pursuant to M.C.L. § 339.916(2);
- f. Awarding any other relief as this Honorable Court deems just and appropriate.

DATED this 16th day of February 2023.

Respectfully Submitted,

/s/ Taxiarchis Hatzidimitriadis
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